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DECORATION DAY
1878.
BY LU. B. CAKE.

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Clarissa M.
1878

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DECORATION DAY.

READ AT THE DECORATION OF THE SOLDIERS' GRAVES, AT CLARINDA, IOWA, MAY 30, 1878, BY LU. B. CAKE.

I.

As some coy maiden, rich in beauty's dow'r.

Who seeks, with fawn-like step, the trysting place,
And brings her choicest sweets to deck the hour

For one who claims the blush upon her face,—
So glides fair Spring from out the twilight shades
That dim the future to our mortal ken.

Her coquette smiles she with her garlands braids,
And steals, all blooming, to the hearts of men.

II.

Not all thine own, sweet virgin of the years.

These love-twined off'rings of the flowery May ;—
Our praises thine ; our garlands and our tears
Are for our dead, this Decoration Day.

III.

Not with the songs of victors,

Bearing the spoils of war ;

Not with our captive foemen

Chained to a conquerors' car ;

Not with triumphal banners ;

Not with a blood-stained sword ;

Not with the shouts of conquest

By maddened throngs encored ;

Not to recall the memories

That ne'er can fade away—

Not to re-crown our heroes

We gather here to-day.

Ah, no! We come as patriots to the altar of the free,
With incense for the sacrifice we've made for liberty.
We come as gray-haired fathers to the sepulchers of sons;
We come as weeping mothers to the graves of dar-
ling ones;
We come as mourning widows to the love that earth
consumes;
We come as sons of heroes to our fathers' honored tombs.
We come, a grateful people, to pay tribute to the brave
Who purchased Union for us with the precious lives
they gave.

V.

Alas! not all are here; some loved ones sleep
Far from the tears which fall from those who weep.
Upon the fields once crimson with their blood;
'Neath waves they colored with life's purple flood;
Or fill the pits near some old prison pen,
Where ling'ring death made martyrs of our men;
Or on the picket line, in some dark wood,
Unwarned they fell, and lie near where they stood.
We strew with flow'rs the graves of these alone;
Of pray'rs and tears we give to those—unknown.

VI.

From out the silence of the slumb'ring past
There comes a sound like murm'ring of the sea,
When o'er its sky the storm-clouds, flying fast,
Arouse the waves to answer sullenly.
Ah, listen! As the echoes fuller flow
They seem a sigh and then the voice of woe.
A nation's voice entreating with her sons,—
The children quar'ling on the mother's breast;
Her pleas unheeded by the wayward ones,
Till passion reigns and riots unrepressed.

The voices of the years from out the past
Are heard more near and clear and audibly.
Oh, listen! Ah! it is the bugle's blast,—
The tramp of armies—charging cavalry!
The beat of drums comes throbbing on the ear—
The roar of battle swelling full and clear;
Its shouts, its groans, and thunder-crash we hear
Of bursting shells and grand artillery!
The nation struggles in the throes of war;
From North, from South, and from the East and West
The armies rush like waves that sweep afar,
Storm-spel, the sea; mid-ocean, crest to crest,
They meet and break, fall tempest-spent to rest,
And Wreck and Death the reigning conq'rors are.

With drums unsnared and bugles all unslung,
The arms are stacked, the columns melt away.
The nation lives, bathed in the blood of sons,
Her grievous wounds slow healing day by day,
And Peace enfolds us in her downy wings.
The husbandman about his labor sings,
The sound of civic arts in all our valleys rings,
The wheels of Progress roll upon their way.

VII.

Within our hearts some glowing mem'ries burn
Of crucial days, when Union strength was tried;
And Shiloh, Corinth, Gettysburg return,
With Vicksburg and Winchester's glorious ride.
And some are here who won immortal fame
At Pea Ridge, Missionary, and Ringgold,
Whom Grant re-christened with the prouder name,
"The first at Chickasaw Bayou,"—were told

To write it on the banners which were borne
Atop old Lookout, where, above the cloud,
It followed Hooker, blood-stained, battle torn,
And o'er our heroes floated, conquest-proud,
Along the march with Sherman to the sea :
Oh ! brave, heroic men ! Oh ! fadeless memory !

VIII.

Oh, countrymen, all who hold Union dear,
How low we prize *this* boon of liberty !
We count its cost in dollars, year by year,—
Forget the priceless blood paid lavishly.
We boast a government like Heaven's, where
All rights are equal with the rich and poor ;
We build our homes and bring our treasures there,
Nor pause to think what makes our own secure.
Yet ev'ry blessing we enjoy to-day
Was born of death,—with blood is sanctified.
Our hearth-stones rest upon our fathers' clay,
And we inherit all for which they died.

IX.

The cost of Union ! Oh, behold the dead,
Her ransom paid in fratricidal war ;
And count the blood-drops, each a ruby red,
In value more than India's jewels are !
And name the toils her worshipers have borne
On land and sea, all wrought with bleeding hands,
And tell the woes of all the hearts that mourn,
And count their tears, unnumbered as the sands,—
And when in poor, cold calculation lost
To this return—Her price is 'bove all cost.

X.

Yea, Union! rarest, best gift of the gods,

The prize of life when 'tis compared with Thee
Becomes a choice ignoble as the clods

Which brutish beasts do spurn disdainfully,
Yet base-borns choose 'gainst bliss eternally.

Not so with these, thine own true worshipers ;
They chose Thee first, above all earthly good,
And made for Thee, these brave idolaters,
The sacrificial off'ring of their blood.

XI.

"Sleep on, now, and take your rest" ; *

The marchings and conflicts are o'er ;
No alert, stealthy foe shall your fortress invest,
Nor a fear of surprise shall your slumber molest,
No battle-cry waken you more.

We know that your sleep must be sweet
From service so loyal and true ;
While your country's proud honors are laid at your feet,
And the blessings of millions fall on you replete,
And their tears on your graves like the dew.

Here, brightest the golden beams fall,
With lingering kiss for each grave ;
And the moonbeams just here seem the softest of all,
And the stars gather nightly on Heaven's high wall
And watch o'er the sleep of the brave.

Here, flowers in red, white, and blue,
Of the "Old Flag" wave overhead ;
And the wild birds sing sweetest, and saddest, here, too,
And the breezes sigh softly and drop the bright dew,
Like tears, on the graves of the dead.

And the pale autumn leaves fall, and fold
All your forms like the blankets of gray ;
And the winter's snow wraps you secure from its cold,
While the winds pipe the martial airs stepped brave
and bold
When you marched to the front of the fray.

And Liberty, throned in the skies.
With the angels, a fond vigil keeps ;
And they hallow the spot where each soldier son lies,
And they watch o'er them ever with unwearied eyes—
For their love neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Do ye dream, oh ! ye brave, of the fair,
While ye wait in the chambers of death ?
And are visions of glory alluring ye there
As they did on the field when ye fell, leading where
Ye sought and won Fame's fading wreath ?

Do the blessings we breathe in our pray'r
Float down through the gates of the tomb ?
Do the words of the brave and the tears of the fair
And the fragrance of flowers, perfuming the air,
Reach all ye who rest in its gloom ?

Oh ! out of the silence ye speak
With a fervor no mortal can tell.
Oh ! *rest*, REST, Boys in Blue ! Our poor words are weak ;
With a pray'r on the lip and a tear on the cheek,
We bless ye, oh ! brave hearts, that fell.

Far away, in that peace-reigning Land,
May your columns unbroken unite ;
May your names on the Roster of Heaven all stand,
And the Army in Blue there, a spirit-throng grand,
Form and march a great army in white.



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XII.

Bear hither, now, the brightest flow'rs of spring,

And wreathe the colors which they loved so dear,
And lay them down, an incense offering,

Upon their graves ; and give a grateful tear,
Warm from your heart, unto their memory.

Oh, pass with reverent steps the soldier's couch,
Where hallowed dust is resting peacefully,

And wind your garlands with a holy touch,
As though you crowned the Cross of Calvary.

To save us Heaven, there He was crucified ;
To save us Union, all unselfishly,

These offered up their lives and died.

Oh ! may we pause and o'er their ashes bow,

And let the dead plead with us silently,
That enmities be all forgotten now—

Our flowers, pray'rs and tears fraternally
Unite, while we renew the solemn, sacred vow :

To *live* as they have *died*, that Union now

And Union henceforth and forever be.

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